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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to identify beginning teachers' perceptions of the role parents play in their children's education; and (2) to investigate the congruency of beginning teachers' perceptions with information presented in teacher education courses. A survey, completed by 178 second- and third-year teachers in Missouri, suggests that the role of parents is for the most part congruent with what is being taught in preservice teacher education; that concerns of beginning teachers change by the second year of teaching; that beginning teachers are not intimidated by parents, but rather look forward to the first parent conference; and that a relationship exists between grade levels taught and perceptions of parental involvement. Based upon research findings it is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted to measure differences in perceptions between preservice teachers at graduation and novices upon completion of 2 years of teaching. (LL)

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Beginning Teacher Perceptions of Parent Role in Education Setting

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine beginning teachers' perceptions of the parent's role in educational setting. A survey was sent to 500 second and third year teachers in Missouri. Results of the survey indicated that beginning teachers do not perceive high parental involvement in the school, that beginning teachers actually look forward to the first parent conference, and that the perception of the role of parents changes over the first two years of teaching. A chi-square analysis revealed that the perception of parent role in the school was related to the grade level taught. Based upon the results of the study, it was recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted to measure the change in perceptions.

Beginning Teacher Perceptions of Parent Role in Education Settings

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This research was conducted by a cross-functional team of professors and students in the Departments of Educational Administration, Curriculum and Instruction (College of Education), and Marketing Management (College of Business) in a regional state university. From feedback obtained through beginning teacher conferences and workshops, there appeared to be a concern that beginning teachers' perceptions of parental roles were not congruent with information presented in university courses.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the research was to identify beginning teachers' perceptions of the role parents play in their childrens' education.

PERSPECTIVES OR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous research has shown that beginning teachers have felt that they were adequately prepared for the challenges of teaching. Within these expectations, beginning teachers also appeared to believe that complete cooperation between parents, students and teachers exist. However, beginning teachers quickly found that conflicts exist which may prevent such cooperation from developing. "Sources of conflict" between parents and teachers "...refers to differences in perceptions parents and teachers have as to what schools should do, what schools presently do, and what schools can do" (Brubaker & Simon, 1993, p. 125).

Because of the number of issues facing beginning teachers, parents have been able to easily influence them. The role of parents has been found to be unfamiliar to beginning teachers. Often the parents of students, particularly in secondary school, are the same generation as the beginning teacher's parents.

In many settings, the first contact beginning teachers have with parents is through planned parent-teacher conferences. While many teacher education programs include development of conferencing skills, evidence indicates that the first conferences are among the highest stress producers experienced by beginning teachers. Among those factors contributing to the stress is the unfamiliarity of the parent to the beginning teacher, and a desire on the part of the teacher to be seen by the parent as an effective teacher.

A priori evidence gathered through roundtable discussions at mandated beginning teacher workshops/conferences has shown that many of the concerns indicated did exist in graduates of the university. In addition, there appeared to be a common thread of concern which surfaced that did not appear to be addressed in the teacher education program.

SEARCH OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review will consist of three primary components. The first section of the review will investigate beginning teachers' idealistic expectations and perceptions of teaching. More specifically, it will address certain expectations pre-service teachers assume to be in place such as adequate preparation and training for the challenges a beginning teacher will face, cooperative relationships with students, parents, and staff, and a consistent, reinforcing and supportive administration. The

second area of the literature review will bring forth the issue of how teacher training programs should address the idealistic perceptions of beginning teachers. More specifically, it will explore pre-service strategies which might be employed in an attempt to bring beginning teachers' perceptions in line with reality. Lastly, the literature regarding parental involvement in education will be reviewed.

Idealistic Perceptions and Expectations of Beginning Teachers

Needs of beginning teachers seem to be very similar regardless of the school, district, state, or country in which they teach. Before entering the classroom for the first time, pre-service teachers often have thoughts similar to the following:

- "My enthusiasm and dedication will be contagious to students, administrators, fellow teachers, and the parents of students in my classes."
- "I'll be able to help every student in my classes enjoy the subject and perform well" (Childers & Podemski, 1982, p. 2).

After a period of time in the classroom, these new teachers often express the following frustrations:

- "No one seems to appreciate how hard I work each day. Everybody seems to be concerned about pointing out my shortcomings."
- "If children in my classes were motivated, I could serve as teacher, not a baby-sitter" (Childers & Podemski, 1982, p. 2).

The first comments are typical of the average beginning teacher who is filled with enthusiasm and optimism. Such anticipations are fostered prior to and during the pre-service teacher's years of higher education. Many teacher educators at various levels of professional training are failing to

portray the true realities of the teaching profession. In actuality, duplication of the "real world" is very difficult in the environment of a structured lecture-based classroom setting. Even with the movement away from the lecture format of instruction toward more problem-solving clinical experiences, it is difficult to prepare for the world of practice.

Childers and Podemski (1982) identified several expectations as students leave their teacher preparations programs. The following expectations have been extrapolated from their more comprehensive list.

1. Colleges will have been adequate in preparation for all of the challenges a teacher will face. Beginning teachers usually feel that they can control most classroom situations when completing the teacher education curriculum (Childers & Podemski, 1982). However, according to a research survey done by Benz (1984), first year teachers rated five areas as deficient in their teacher preparation curriculum:

- Classroom management
- Establishing rapport with pupils
- Working in an organization
- Understanding the changing nature of pupils' families
- Working with parents (p. 7,8).

Benz postulates that these deficiencies are not surprising as they are performance skills that develop over time and are very difficult to assess.

Another study by Good (1983), conferred that education courses and textbooks communicate the belief that learning is non-problematic if certain methods are applied. Beginning teachers are typically encouraged to discover their own personal teaching style or do what "feels right" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). The innuendo is that teaching is instinctive rather than learned (Weinstein, 1988).

2. Cooperative relationships will exist routinely between students, parents, and staff. New teachers may experience complete cooperation from students, parents, and the school's staff. However, they often encounter barriers which hinder the development of positive relationships (Childers & Podemski, 1982).

Students are an influential factor affecting a beginning teacher's early career development. New teachers often have preconceptions about students' behavior and performance as well as the kinds of relationships they want to develop with students. These perceptions are often based on their previous experiences working with children in camp, baby-sitting, etc. Their confidence tends to be dismantled when students fail to adhere to their teaching methods and procedures (Weinstein, 1988).

Parents are another significant factor in the socialization of beginning teachers. Parental effects vary from teacher to teacher, but perhaps there is no other factor for which most new teachers are less prepared. Beginning teachers seem to be unaware of what to expect from parents because of their restricted exposure to them. Moreover, beginning teachers perceptions of how well they are doing as teachers can be swayed substantially by only one or two parents in a classroom. Parents can cause first year teachers to have positive of negative feelings about teaching. For instance, negative feedback could be received from those parents who are not willing or able to arrange conferences (Childers & Podemski, 1982).

Colleagues or staff members also clearly play a central role in beginning teachers' socialization. According to Hitz and Roper, most preparation programs consist of teachers listening to an "expert" tell them how to teach. Rarely are teachers given the opportunity to study together and exchange ideas. Furthermore, they are seldom allowed to observe one

another and offer helpful advice (Hitz & Roper, 1986). Time constraints may also come into play with a new teacher's inability to develop cooperative relationships with their colleagues (Wildman, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1987).

Wildman et al. (1987) cite several sources whereby colleagues can help novices feel confident about teaching by doing the following:

- easing the tension caused by the enormous uncertainty inherent in beginning teaching
- providing standards against which beginning teachers can monitor their progress in becoming educators
- reducing the work load by offering time-saving suggestions and sharing paraphernalia.

3. Administrators are also key players in the socialization process for new teachers. Many beginning teachers perceive that the administrative body, more specifically the principal, will become a new confidant. However, beginning teachers should not expect the principal to play "buddy." The principal is the administrative manager of the school, the person who organizes, supervises, and evaluates school activities. He/she acts as a liaison between parents and teachers as well as the students. Most administrators are more apt to go the extra mile with new teachers to help them understand the school system. However, teachers must not expect the principal to be a relentless "hand-holder" during the first months of teaching. Most principals will expect their new teachers to be self-motivated and self-sufficient (Childers & Podemski, 1982).

Pre-service Teacher Expectations Versus Reality

The progression from learning in a college classroom to teaching in one's own classroom can overwhelm first-year teachers. Many educators have tried to resolve why the transition from being a student to becoming the teacher causes such a "reality shock." A justification may be that the beginning teachers are under-trained for the requirements of their jobs and may therefore, experience a lack of confidence. This predicament prevents the first-year teacher from mastering skills in the university and then applying them in their own classroom (Weinstein, 1988).

Another reason for the "reality shock" may originate from new teachers having the same tasks as the experienced teachers. The only point of dissimilarity may be that beginning teachers may generally have to do the displeasing tasks, such as instructing the most demanding class, or supervising the undesirable extracurricular assignments.

When developing strategies to deal with inappropriate idealistic expectations, it is important to guard against the development of mediocre expectations or loss of enthusiasm. It is crucial for new teachers to be highly motivated and enthusiastic when they begin their careers. However, this motivation and enthusiasm should be based on healthy realism. Beginning teachers need to examine their own anticipations and determine the degree to which those will be met in their new teaching assignment. Adaptations by teacher training programs can play an important role in developing proper, realistic expectations for prospective teachers. Many first-year teachers model their philosophy of teaching after their instructors' methods and adopt role expectations that are presented in university courses. Teacher-training programs in general, and individual methods courses specifically, should attempt to help students develop

realistic expectations for teaching. The more that typical idealistic expectations are confronted in course work, the more likely prospective teachers will be able to adjust to the real world of practice (Childers & Podemski, 1982).

Special attention needs to be paid to the organizational, structural, interpersonal, social, and community aspects of the school during teacher training programs (Childers & Podemski, 1982). The following are general needs expressed by beginning teachers regarding induction programs according to Hitz and Roper, (1986):

1. To learn how to work with other adults: parents, administrators, and aides (OSSHE, 1985).
2. To learn to work effectively with colleagues (OSSHE, 1985).
3. To be given a more realistic view of the teaching profession.
4. To be given a better, more complete theoretical framework from which to work (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981; Cohen, 1983).
5. To understand the foundation of lesson development and presentation.
6. To learn how to use curriculum materials to guide lesson planning.
7. To learn how to organize and manage the classroom.
8. To gain an awareness of students with special needs (Guerrero & Mason , 1989).

To enhance the success of induction programs, Roper, Hitz, & Brim, (1985) recommended a class called "Realities of Education." This class should be a class offered to freshman which includes the following objectives:

- Each student should be assigned a teacher pen-pal for the purpose of giving the students the opportunity of experiencing the

"realities" of teaching in different settings.

- In-class visits by administrators, parents, teachers, and school-board members should be scheduled so that students can gain a perspective from each of these groups.
- Observations with follow-up sessions enabling students to describe their experiences, ideas, and problems.

It is crucial for teacher educators to deal honestly with students by giving them a realistic view of the nature of schools and the teaching profession. Students need to be prepared to work in a variety of settings while selecting the schools in which they function best. Thus, a realistic view of teaching can prevent some people from entering a profession for which they may not be suited. A realistic view of schools may further enable students to match their own interests and abilities to the schools where they would be most comfortable teaching (Hitz & Roper, 1986).

Parental Involvement

Although realistic expectations and adequate training are important to the development of the beginning teachers, the consideration of parental involvement is more pertinent for the purpose of this research.

Parental involvement, defined by many educators, is a term that could be explained in a variety of ways. Walberg (1984) reviewed a number of studies regarding parental roles and suggested that a parent's interaction, either directly or indirectly, has a significant influence on the child's cognitive, affective and behavioral learning (Clarke & Williams, 1992).

Active parental involvement is associated with an increase in academic endeavors and school attendance and a decrease in behavioral problems (USDE, 1989; as cited in Clarke & Williams, 1992). According to Lareau and

Benson (1984), partnerships give the parents a sense of "ownership" in their child's school environment. The home/school partnership is considered a powerful factor for improving their child's academic achievements (Clarke & Williams, 1992). Swick (1991) describes four levels of parental participation that contribute to a child's learning experience:

- teaching
- supporting
- doing
- decision making

These factors give parents the opportunity to help improve their child's ability to learn through their educational programs by shaping goals and strategies for classroom and school improvement.

Parents may assume various degrees of involvement ranging from a passive to a very active approach. According to Swick, passive parents stay at a minimal involvement level, where active parents are involved on a continuous basis. With the involvement of parents in a child's education, teachers can benefit and respond to the "unique and complementary roles" in which parents can engage (Swick, 1991).

Active involvement of teachers and parents in a child's growing education requires a system of review and collaboration. Seeking a match between the needs of the child and learning strategies will enhance the relationship of the teacher and parents. According to Swick (1991), the educator and parent should establish or create a real sense of mutuality. It is imperative to set objectives that provide a framework for parents and teachers to work together for the benefit of the child.

The top priority of any partner relationship is to succeed in reaching the stage of growth where both the individuals have a sense of emotional

involvement and the cognitive utensils necessary for seeking the relationship. Teacher-parent relationships entail:

- joint planning and doing activities that enrich the home and classroom environment
- support for carrying out teaching and nurturing roles
- engaging in continuous communication that strengthens the teacher and parents' status (Swick, 1991).

Children enter school with a variety of different skills, behaviors, and learning techniques. Research indicates that the differences are because of environmental, behavioral, and genetic factors. Teachers are influential in their teaching, but it is evident that the most influential learning process begins in the home environment (Rotter, Robinson, & Fey, 1987).

Interaction between parents and teachers must begin with effective communication. Showing empathy and respect will lead to effective growth, change, and problem solving between teachers and parents (Rotter, Robinson, & Fey, 1987). In order to succeed in communication, individuals must relate to each other with an open mind to be able to accomplish their mutually determined objectives. Parent-teacher conferences are vehicles whereby the communication dialogue can be initiated and nurtured. This critically important dialogue can be equally uncomfortable for parents and the inexperienced beginning teacher. More stress on the art of conferencing during teacher training would enable the novice teacher to relax and make the conferences more productive.

The global environment that society is faced with today has challenges that must be met by the parent, teacher, and the child. They need to work together to emphasize the need for more education, the "...understanding of

what makes people humane, and a sensitivity to the complexities of living in a constantly changing world" (Swick, 1991, p. 146). With societal pressures, the teacher and parent must acquire mutual understanding that will grow with the challenges that lie ahead (Swick, 1991).

Methodology

A survey instrument was designed by the undergraduate research team to gather data regarding the objective of this research. The instrument consisted of ten items. The first five items collected demographic and the remaining items were statements pertaining to the school environment which called for responses on a Likert type scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The sample was generated using a list of 3947 second and third year teachers provided by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. A systematic sampling method was used to draw a sample of 500 subjects using every eighth name on the list beginning at a randomly selected point. Surveys were mailed to all members of the sample group and included a business reply envelope for return of the completed surveys.

The data were analyzed using SAS version 6.06. A 95% level of confidence was established for all statistical comparisons with an alpha of .05 ($p<.05$). Statistical comparisons used the chi-square statistic since it was most appropriate for use with the nominal and ordinal data.

Data Analysis

There were 178 surveys returned of the 500 mailed resulting in a 35.6% return. The low return was determined to be a result of inaccurate addresses for many second year teachers, and a lack of interest in

participation in the study. Eighty and one tenth percent of the respondents were female and 79.1% earned certification at institutions in Missouri. When asked to indicate the number of students in the school, the respondents indicated that 5.8% had 100 or fewer students, 57.6% had 101-500, 34.3% had 601-1000 and 2.3% had over 1000 students. Fifty-five and seven tenths percent of the respondents were teaching in elementary schools, 14.9% in middle/jr. high schools, and 29.3% in high schools. All but one respondent taught in public school systems.

When asked whether they felt they were restricted by the administration in applying new methods and techniques, 79.5% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. The respondents were also asked whether they believed parents were involved in their children's education with 68.1% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Seventy-one percent of the respondents disagreed with being intimidated by parents, and 52% agreed or strongly agreed that they looked forward to the first parent conference. The final item asked whether the teachers' perceptions of the parental role changed during the first two years of teaching with 56.8% of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Chi-square analyses were conducted comparing four of the five demographic items with each of the statements. In order to avoid cells with below expected frequencies, size of school was collapsed to provide two levels, 500 and fewer, and more than 500; and all Likert type items had strongly agree-agree combined along with strongly disagree-disagree. Of the 20 comparisons, one showed a statistically significant interdependence.

When grade levels taught were compared with whether there was perceived high parental involvement in the school, a statistically significant interdependence resulted ($p<.05$). Sixty-eight and four

hundredths percent of elementary teachers, 73.08% of middle school teachers, and 66.67% of high school teachers at least disagreed that parents were involved in the school. Showing agreement that parents were involved were 24.74% of elementary teachers and 19.23 % of middle level teachers while 23.53% of high school teachers had no opinion (Table 1).

Table 1

Chi-square Comparison of
Grade Levels Taught by Parent Involvement

Grade Level		Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Elementary	Frequency	24	7	66
	Percent	33.79%	4.02%	37.93%
	Row%	24.74%	7.22%	68.04%
	Col%	70.59%	33.33%	55.46%
Middle	Frequency	5	2	19
	Percent	2.87%	1.15%	10.92%
	Row%	19.23%	7.69%	73.08%
	Col%	14.71%	9.52%	15.97%
High School	Frequency	5	12	34
	Percent	2.87%	6.90%	19.54%
	Row%	9.80%	23.53%	66.67%
	Col%	14.71%	57.14%	28.57%
	Chi-square = 11.781		df=4	p=.019

Discussion

The data appeared to indicate that the a priori concerns of beginning teachers change by the second year of teaching. The data indicated that not only did beginning teachers find themselves not intimidated by parents, but they looked forward to the first parent conference. Of practical significance is that there may be a difference in what teacher education programs teach about parents and what is experienced on the job. With 56.8%

of the respondents indicating that their perceptions of parental role changed over the first two years of teaching, there appears to be a need to look at what is being taught and what is really the case in the schools. This substantiated findings by Benz (1984) which were cited in the literature review.

All of the chi-square comparisons except for one found no statistically significant interdependence between gender, where the teaching degree was earned, and the size of school with the perception questions. However, there was a significant relationship found between the grade levels taught and the perception of parental involvement. The teachers at the elementary and middle/jr. high level either agree that parents are involved (68.04%, 73.08%) or disagree (24.74%, 19.23%). At the high school level the respondents either agreed (66.67%) or had no opinion (23.53%). This appears to indicate that if high school teachers do not see involvement, they may be inclined to indicate that it is not known whether parents are involved. The literature indicated that one of the roles of the parent is to nurture their children as a part of schooling. It may be that by high school the perception of what it is that makes up nurturing may change. Thus, by not being actively involved on a day to day basis with the school, parents are in reality nurturing their children by allowing them to develop their own concept of independence. Parental involvement at that high school level most likely then would occur when the child has failed, or appears to be failing to use the independence in a positive manner.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is concluded that based upon these data the perception role of parents in educational settings by beginning teachers is for the most part congruent with what is being taught in undergraduate teacher education programs. It is also concluded that whatever the perception is that is taught in the teacher education program, the beginning teacher's perception changes over the first two years. Further, it is concluded that while beginning teachers in the first semester indicated on an informal basis that they most feared the first parent conference, as substantiated in the literature, that most beginning teachers actually look forward to the first conference.

It is recommended that the following be considered as a part of this study:

1. that the study be replicated using a larger sample.
2. that a more sensitive data collection instrument be developed for use in future studies.
3. that a longitudinal study be conducted that measures the differences in perception between teacher education graduates at graduation and after two years of teaching.

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